

TARA vs ESAT vs TMUA

Three UAT-UK tests, three different signals. The exact course page decides which one belongs in your application.

THE SHORT ANSWER

TARA tests generic critical thinking, problem solving and writing. **ESAT** tests rapid school mathematics and science in course-set modules. **TMUA** tests mathematical application and reasoning across two longer papers. Never choose by university name or subject family alone; check every exact course and entry year.

Checked against the sources named in this guide, August 2026. British English. Free to share.

1 The decision rule is brutally simple

Open each official course page on your application list. Write the named test and, for ESAT, the required module combination. If different choices require different tests, one score does not replace the other.

The university name is not enough. Oxford uses TARA for PPE and Human Sciences, TMUA for Mathematics and Computer Science, and ESAT for Physics and Engineering Science in its 2027-entry list. UCL's 2027 information similarly spans TARA, TMUA and ESAT across different departments.

1 The tell

"I am applying for Computer Science" still does not identify the test. UCL Computer Science names TARA for 2027 entry; Oxford Computer Science names TMUA. Course, university and entry year travel together.

2 The formats at a glance

	TARA	ESAT	TMUA
Core signal	Generic reasoning and concise written argument	Application of required school maths/science	Mathematical application, reasoning and elementary logic
Structure	CT 22/40; PS 22/40; Writing 1 of 3/40	27 MCQs/40 min in each selected module	Two papers, each 20 MCQs/75 min
Knowledge	No subject-specific knowledge; listed basic maths for PS	Course-set Mathematics 1 plus other maths/science modules	Higher GCSE or AS-level mathematics, plus Paper 2 logic
Reported result	Separate CT and PS scores; writing unscored by UAT-UK	Separate score for each module	One overall score
Calculator	Not permitted	Not permitted	Not permitted

The row "Core signal" is a summary of the official test descriptions, not a claim that universities ignore the rest of your application.

3 The clocks create different sports

Average multiple-choice time budgets are:

$$\frac{2400}{22} = 109.1, \quad \frac{2400}{27} = 88.9, \quad \frac{4500}{20} = 225.$$

They correspond to TARA, ESAT and TMUA respectively, in seconds per item.

TARA gives more time per multiple-choice question than ESAT, then asks you to read arguments, separate relevant data and switch into a full Writing Task. ESAT compresses recognition and execution. TMUA gives much longer per question and spends that time on sustained mathematical reasoning.

Sharing algebra practice can help all three where numerical reasoning appears. Sharing a timer without adapting the task will not.

4 Worked TARA problem: basic maths, unfamiliar organisation

Worked example Rotating volunteers across stations

A workshop has three stations. Station A needs 2 volunteers, B needs 3 and C needs 4. Nine volunteers are assigned so every station is staffed. After each 20-minute round, exactly one volunteer moves from A to B, one from B to C and one from C to A. Which statement must be true after any whole number of rounds?

Each station loses one volunteer and gains one volunteer in every round. Its total therefore does not change. The staffing remains:

$$(2, 3, 4).$$

So every station still has its original number of volunteers.

Correct: Track the invariant. Individual people move, but the net change at each station is zero.

Trap: Adding the three moves as though they create three extra volunteers confuses movement with growth.

This is TARA-shaped because the arithmetic is basic and the insight is structural. An ESAT item may place a similar invariant inside subject knowledge at higher speed. A TMUA item may extend the invariant through several cases or ask for a general mathematical consequence.

2 Try it

When you reuse a topic across tests, write the test-specific demand beside it: TARA selection or structure; ESAT rapid subject application; TMUA sustained mathematical proof and logic. Shared foundations need separate timed sets.

5 If your application requires two tests

Start with common foundations, then preserve separate paper habits.

- **TARA with TMUA:** share clean arithmetic and logical discipline; separately train TARA passages, data filtering and writing, and TMUA's two-paper mathematical depth.
- **TARA with ESAT:** share estimation and disciplined multiple choice; separately train TARA argument structure and ESAT's exact science or mathematics modules.
- **ESAT with TMUA:** share algebra, graphs and no-calculator fluency; separately train 89-second module decisions and 225-second reasoning chains.

Weight the earlier compulsory sitting and the larger diagnostic weakness. Do not split hours equally merely because two test names appear on your calendar.

6 Three booking mistakes

1. **Assuming one university uses one test.** Departments and courses differ.
2. **Assuming January is open to everyone.** Most standard Oxford and Cambridge applicants must sit UAT-UK tests in October; narrow exceptions exist.
3. **Registering the wrong ESAT modules.** UAT-UK warns that the combination cannot be changed at the test centre.

For 2027 entry, all three tests run in the 12–16 October 2026 window and 4–8 January 2027 window, subject to regional delivery restrictions. The booking deadline for October is 28 September 2026 at 6 pm UK time. Rules and course lists can change; verify them live.

7 Sources

UAT-UK official test pages

Current formats, content, scoring and registration guidance: [TARA](#); [ESAT](#); [TMUA](#).

UAT-UK, Deadlines

2027-entry windows, booking deadlines, sitting restrictions and regional delivery dates. [Check the current deadlines](#).

Oxford and UCL course routing

Official 2027 examples: [Oxford admissions tests](#); [UCL tests, tasks and interviews](#).

Requirements are course- and year-specific. The worked example is original. UniGenius is independent of UAT-UK and the universities.